

# Get Involved Your Teenage Daughter Isn't Just Saying "No" To Dr

by Dr. Jenn Berman

A recently released analysis of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health revealed what therapists have long suspected and parents have not wanted to believe: teenage girls are experimenting with marijuana, alcohol and tobacco at higher rates than their male counterparts. That is surprising both because historically boys have led the pack in drug and alcohol use and because, over the last decade, teen drug use has been declining overall among teenagers.

## Why Girls are at Risk

There are a few reasons why girls are particularly susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse. One common cause often cited is that girls, even more so than boys, are under tremendous pressure to succeed. Adolescent girls report feeling increasing pressure to be perfect; to get straight "A's", be popular and look like supermodels. They are bombarded by images of unrealistic standards of beauty on television, the Internet, in magazines, and in movies. In addition, girls today are under a lot of pressure to be prematurely sexual. In today's teen culture girls are expected to "hook up" or have emotionless sexual experiences. Many times girls who don't feel ready but want to fit in or please a boy they like will drink or take drugs to avoid feeling the emotions associated with having a sexual experience they are not comfortable with or are not ready for.

## The Dangers for Girls

Girls and boys tend to turn to substance abuse for different reasons. Boys tend to experiment because they are looking for a rush while girls often try them to escape. A study at CASA, the Columbia University's National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse, revealed that girls tend to develop addictions faster than boys even when using the same or smaller amounts of a particular substance. In addition, substance abuse can have lasting and damaging effects on a teens developing body. In fact, pediatric experts claim that even moderate drinking can disrupt a girl's growth and reproductive system, which can take years to regain, if at all.

## What You Can Do

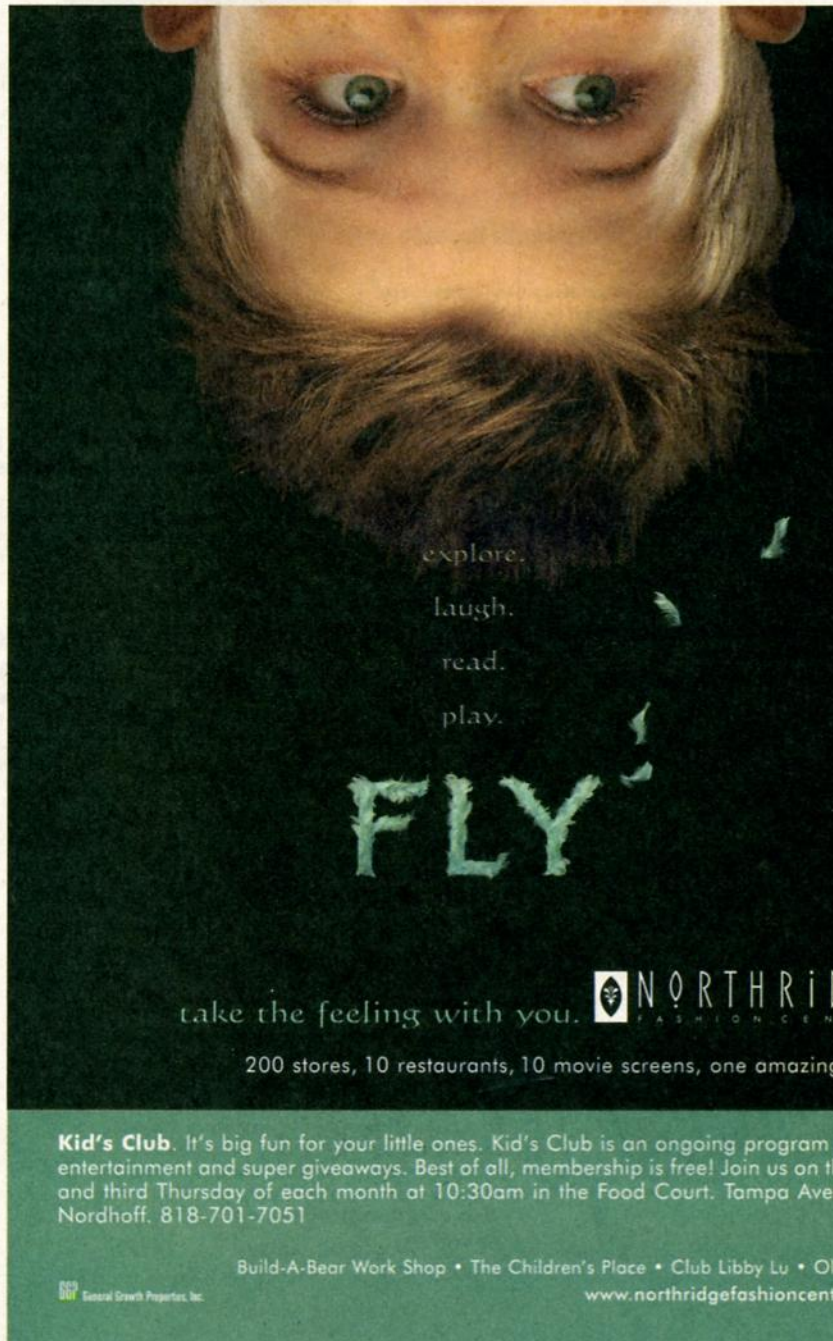
The best prevention for substance abuse is consistent and loving parenting with boundaries. Many parents today are so concerned with being their child's friend that they are afraid to set boundaries. Daughters look to their parents to figure out their own morals and values. CASA's Formative Years survey showed that 61.6 percent of girls who had conversations with their parents about controlled substances said that the conversations

made them less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs. Religious involvement also tends to be a protective factor for girls.

There are many different precursors for substance abuse problems. Frequent relocation has been shown to increase the risk factors for girls. Also transition times like going from junior high to high school or high school to college seems to mark vulnerable periods for girls. Surprisingly, caffeine consumption has been linked to substance abuse problems in girls. Girls who drink cof-


fee as children are significantly more likely to smoke and drink. Whether these risks exist because they are an indication of parental involvement or another, psychological reason is difficult to say but studies show that parents who are more involved in their daughter's lives tend to have fewer problems with drugs and alcohol.

*Dr. Jenn Berman is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice in Los Angeles. Information on her upcoming Prime Time TV appearance on her Monday night radio show (10 to midnight (FM), check out Dr. Jenn's website at [www.DrJenn.com](http://www.DrJenn.com)*



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